

SC DNR Wildlife and Freshwater Fisheries Advisory Committee
May 5, 2015 Minutes
Rembert Dennis Building, Columbia, SC

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Chair Mike Hutchins, Vice-Chair Cleve Smith, Bobby Garmany, Sam Hiott, Stephen Thomas, Martha Herbert

MEMBERS ABSENT:

John Gramling, Stan Halliday

STAFF PRESENT:

Emily Cope, Ken Prosser, Susan Johnson, Billy Dukes, Derrell Shipes, Sam Chappellear, Lynn Quattro, Charles Ruth, Michael Hook, Bob Perry, Capt. Billy Downer

GUESTS COMMENTS:

No guests were present

Chair Hutchins called the meeting to order and the minutes of the February 10, 2015 meeting were approved.

HUNTING ETHICS:

Emily Cope reported at the February Advisory Committee meeting there was discussion on how to better incorporate waterfowl hunting ethics into Hunter Education classes. Capt. Billy Downer, head of DNR's Hunter Ed Program, distributed copies of the current education handbook in SC and DNR's Migratory Game Bird Hunting Guidebook. Capt. Downer stated Hunter Education instructors spend a lot of class room time addressing responsible hunting and ethics. Capt. Downer called attention to the "10 Commandments of Public Duck Hunting" (rules to live by when hunting public land, taken from Ducks Unlimited) listed in the MGB Guidebook, a light-hearted approach to hunting ducks ethically.

Capt. Downer reported he will encourage Hunter Ed instructors to spend 10 to 15 minutes of classroom time focusing on waterfowl hunting issues i.e., sky busting, early shooting, how far is too far to shoot, the use of retrieving dogs, when reviewing responsible and ethical hunting.

Capt. Downer stated the "10 Commandments of Public Duck Hunting" as listed in the MGB Guidebook can be changed to include a more serious approach. He offered to meet with Committee Members to compose this revision to the Guidebook.

Committee Member Hiott stated one way of addressing ethical hunting might be handled through the school system. Additionally, individuals receiving violations for any of the issues mentioned, could perhaps be required to attend a hunter safety and ethics class. Capt. Downer reported that Hunter Education is getting back in the school system and this would be an excellent opportunity to address ethical issues. While Capt. Downer stated this sounds like a great idea, it would require legislation.

Capt. Downer stated the hunter education course is available on line 24/7 and he feels staff should continue with classroom instruction and getting into the school system to make these very important points.

Committee Member Garmany stated in the future perhaps every 5th year a hunting license is renewed, an additional ethical course could be required.

Capt. Downer stated commercials could be very beneficial but funding would be an issue.

Chair Hutchins reported sky busting and early shooting are a big concern.

AQUATIC PLANT MANAGEMENT COUNCIL MEETING:

Emily Cope introduced Michael Hook as the new Small Game Project Leader. He was recruited from Land and Water Division. At the February WFF Advisory Committee meeting, Mr. Hook reported on the Aquatic Plant Management Plan and forthcoming stocking recommendations. As part of this Committee's concerns regarding the Plan, Committee Member Steve Thomas drafted a letter to Chris Page (Chairman of APMC) for Chair Hutchins' signature. Mrs. Cope feels the letter was influential in the outcome of the recent meeting of the APMC.

The Draft APM Plan was approved with the exception of grass carp stocking recommendations on the Santee Cooper Lake System. It was determined that the decision on the issue of stocking will be made by DNR. Director Alvin Taylor will soon be meeting with officials from Santee Cooper to discuss this topic. Mrs. Cope thanked the Committee for their input in this process, especially Committee Member Steven Thomas composing the letter for Chair Hutchins' signature.

Committee Member Thomas provided a handout reflecting hunter use and ducks killed on the Santee Cooper system WMAs from 2005-06 to 2014-15 (submerged non hydrilla vegetation coverage) and a copy of the letter sent to the APMC signed by Chair Hutchins (copies attached to the original minutes). WMAs included Sandy Beach, The Hatchery, Potato Creek and Santee Cooper. Mr. Thomas stated part of the problem of crowding for waterfowl hunting on the coast could be alleviated by submerged aquatics on the Santee Cooper system. Doing so would keep and hunters more evenly distributed.

Mr. Thomas stated Santee Cooper has an obligation by their FERC license to manage for hydro generation and recreation to include boating, fishing, waterfowl hunting, etc. The WFF AC feels additional stocking of grass carp at this time is not indicated.

Mrs. Cope mentioned DNR is gearing up to embark upon reviewing its cooperative agreement with Santee Cooper in regard to the lakes and that future management of the lakes will certainly be discussed.

Bob Perry stated currently being discussed is the possibility of DNR helping Santee Cooper embrace adaptive management to a greater degree.

Chair Hutchins stated he thinks this topic should be revisited each year at the second quarter meeting of the Advisory Committee.

MID-WINTER WATERFOWL SURVEY IN SC:

Derrell Shipes, Chief, Statewide Projects distributed copies of the Atlantic Flyway's Midwinter Waterfowl Survey (final report dated March 2, 2015) (copy attached to the original minutes). Mr. Shipes stated for a number of years the Fish and Wildlife Service has flown a mid-winter survey the last week of duck season or the first week afterwards. Traditional routes along the coast are flown and the survey is a snapshot of the number of ducks that are in SC at the time. A total of 135,325 ducks were observed in

SC. Mr. Shipes reported it is obvious they miss a lot of ducks because 0 green wing teal were reported (even though they are very small and difficult to see). WFF now has 2 individuals that will soon attend FWS training on water escape from aircraft so they will be qualified to fly with the FWS to conduct future surveys.

Committee Member Garmany inquired about the private impoundment youth waterfowl hunt for youth not selected by DNR's draw hunt process. Mr. Shipes reported 59 youth participated in a hunt sponsored by the SC Waterfowl Association, Ducks Unlimited and Delta Waterfowl. Mr. Shipes stated the hunt proved successful and this process will be repeated in the future.

LEGISLATIVE UPDATE:

Emily Cope reported the House and Senate have passed the turkey legislation and is awaiting the governor's signature. The bill will allow a statewide season of March 20 to May 5, with a three bird bag limit with a youth weekend the Saturday and Sunday prior to March 20. The bill will have a 3 year sunset clause and turkey project biological research information will be reviewed in a few years for guidance.

Mrs. Cope reported staff has spoken with Senator Cromer regarding legislative changes (size limits) for American Eel so that DNR is in compliance with Atlantic States Marine Fishery. Since May 1 was the crossover date for legislation, it will not pass this session.

Another bill that has passed the House and Senate and awaiting the Governor's signature would require non-hunters on WMA lands to wear international orange during deer season.

Mrs. Cope stated DNR has been given the opportunity to sell the Federal duck stamp electronically. Hopefully, the process will be in place next year and the stamp can be ordered on line and mailed.

Senator Campsen introduced changes in the tagging/limits for deer. Hunters will be allowed to purchase 4 buck and 4 antlerless deer tags for \$15.00 and the ADQP becomes the Doe Quota Program and buck tags will be issued as well as the doe tags. This legislation has passed the Senate and now resides in the House. Staff continues to meet with members of the General Assembly to explain this legislation. Mrs. Cope encouraged committee members to contact their local legislators if they are interested in seeing this bill pass.

OTHER OLD and/or NEW BUSINESS:

Senior Biologist Sam Chappelle reported Director Taylor and other DNR staff (along with a representative from DU) recently met at Samworth WMA to discuss infrastructure needs, management challenges, staffing issues, and funding sources for the project. This meeting was held as a result of issues raised at the Committee's February meeting by constituents from Georgetown County. Mr. Chappelle updated the Committee on recent progress at Samworth and announced two technicians, one biologist and one hourly employee have been hired since the February meeting. Mr. Chappelle also reported on additional activities on other areas within the Upper Coastal Waterfowl Project.

ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEMBER COMMENTS:

Mr. Smith reported the DNR app is operational and looks great.

Mr. Thomas thanked Chair Hutchins for his support on aquatic plant management issues.

Ms. Herbert thanked DNR staff for their dedication and hard work in addressing issues that were brought up at previous Committee meetings.

Mr. Garmany reiterated Ms. Herbert's comments and stated he will be passing along this update to private landowners in the Georgetown area and he knows it will mean a lot to them.

Mr. Hiott stated it is refreshing to see what all is being accomplished and how hard staff is working. He also encouraged staff to keep up the good work.

Ms. Herbert inquired about changes in hunting dates for falconers to allow for a longer season. Derrell Shipes reported there is a prescribed falconry period beyond waterfowl gun hunts. He stated currently in South Carolina (for rabbits and squirrels) there is a state season which relates to firearms and falconry. Falconers can fly their birds (not necessarily hunt) any day of the year and it is not illegal for them to catch a squirrel or rabbit. Their bird would be allowed to feed on the game, but they are not allowed to take the game home with him or her if it is not in season. Legislation would be required for the state to expand rabbit or squirrel seasons to allow for a falconry period. Mr. Shipes reported staff is in the process of creating a web page for falconry in South Carolina to include new regulations. He would be open and interested in further discussion on this topic.

DATE, TIME AND PLACE OF NEXT MEETING:

Tuesday, August 18, 2015 at 10:00 AM, Columbia DNR Office.